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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001767

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KCRM](#) [KCOR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: FOREIGN INVESTIGATIONS MAY BE EXACTING  
TOLL ON FORMER DELTA STATE GOVERNOR JAMES IBORI

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty  
for reasons in Sections 1.4. (B) and (D).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) A U.S. businessman and self-described lobbyist for the Nigerian Government (GON) recently informed Embassy of an alleged "deal" that controversial former Delta State Governor James Ibori would like to make in return for pledges by foreign governments not to prosecute him. While we doubt any government would accept it, Ibori's alleged maneuver through an intermediary shows that foreign investigations and arrest warrants may be restricting Ibori's ability to travel and use his ill-gotten wealth. END SUMMARY.

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IBORI SAYS "LET'S MAKE A DEAL"  
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2. (C) A U.S. businessman and reputed lobbyist, based in the Washington D.C. area, recently told us that former Delta State Governor Ibori would like to establish a development trust fund for Nigeria, endowed with 20 to 50 percent of funds he "acquired" over the years, in return for promises by foreign governments not to prosecute him. This contact estimated Ibori's "acquired" earnings at some three billion U.S. dollars. As part of Ibori's proposal, an international board of directors would oversee trust fund spending, with five persons selected by the international community, including the United States and United Kingdom, and the remaining four chosen by Nigeria. The Ibori-proposed trust fund would support development projects for electricity generation, potable water supply, and police reform. Ibori would also undertake to convince other former governors currently under investigation to follow suit, and return billions of dollars in stolen money in exchange for agreements not to prosecute them. The intermediary conceded that any proposed amnesty arrangement that enabled Ibori or any other governor to retain most of their ill-gotten funds without serving any jail time would not deter future Nigerian officeholders from doing the same. He averred that Ibori would never willingly agree to serve jail time.

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IBORI CLAIMS HE BANKROLLED CAMPAIGNS  
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13. (C) The contact described Ibori as President Yar'Adua's "closest advisor," asserting that the former governor had "financed" his presidential campaign." Calling Ibori "the most powerful man in Nigeria today," he claimed Ibori had obtained "total control" over the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) through the bankrolling of "most" of the party's gubernatorial campaigns in 2007. This contact claimed that Ibori, former Anambra gubernatorial candidate Andy Uba, and billionaire associate of former President Obasanjo, Aliko Dangote (the President of Dangote Group, who made the Forbes list last year, at number 303, of the world's richest persons), actually ran the country's affairs. Moreover, he said, these three individuals have anointed current Bauchi State governor and Yar'Adua son-in-law Isa Yuguda as the President's successor, should Yar'Adua not be able to stand for re-election in 2011. All three reportedly believe that failing health will prevent the President from running for re-election.

14. (C) The U.S. citizen contact said he had become a confidant of the former governor through circumstances "not entirely within (his) control." He claimed that he had informed the former governor he is seen in the U.S. as a "thug and a criminal" and expressed keen interest in reforming Ibori's image. The contact claimed to have been present when processions of high-level politicians and military generals arrived to pay their respects to Ibori and, occasionally, to Ibori, Uba, and Dangote simultaneously. Insisting that he had "wrapped" himself in the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the contact denied any involvement in graft.

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POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS RUN HIGH  
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15. (C) When asked whether Ibori aspired to be on the PDP ticket as a vice presidential candidate, the contact told PolOff that "his sights are set higher than that." He noted that Ibori planned to release position papers "soon" on various political and social issues to prepare for a possible campaign.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) Ibori almost certainly recognizes that foreign prosecutors are closing in on him. The Metropolitan London Police issued an arrest warrant September 9 for Ibori's former Delta State Finance Minister David Edevbie, who now serves as President Yar'Adua's Principal Private Secretary. The UK reportedly holds Ibori's mistress, former business partner Henry Imasekha, and attorney Bhadresh Gohil in custody, and they may be cooperating in the ongoing investigation. Ibori likely knows that travel to Europe to spend his ill-gotten wealth would be risky, as authorities could detain and transfer him to the UK. He may also be concerned that the same fate could await him should he travel to the U.S.

17. (C) While we have not independently verified the contact's status as a registered lobbyist, he certainly fits the pattern. During a recent Congressional visit, he had pressed energetically for our visitor to meet with Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairperson Farida Waziri. PolCouns tactfully dissuaded our visitor from this undertaking by noting that such a high-profile meeting could undercut her messages to the GON on good governance and transparency. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Embassy cleared this telegram with Consulate General Lagos.

